Gender Justice as a Systems Lens: Advancing Gender and Social Equity in Bangladesh

Helvetas Bangladesh uses the term Gender Justice and Social Inclusion (GJSI) to strengthen and operationalize Helvetas' global Gender and Social Equity (GSE) commitment through a systems-thinking approach adapted to the country context.

Global Foundation: Gender and Social Equity

Helvetas globally advances Gender and Social Equity (GSE) as a core institutional commitment to address structural inequalities, promote inclusion, and ensure equity across programmes, partnerships, and organizational systems. This commitment is anchored in Helvetas' global GSE Policy and Strategy, supported by institutional instruments and tools such as the GSE Diamonds, GSE Marker, political economy and power analysis (PEPA), and safeguarding standards.

Globally, GSE is an institutional transversal priority, ensuring its integration across all sectors and functions of Helvetas' work.

A Systems Perspective from Helvetas Bangladesh

From a system-thinking perspective, inequality is produced and sustained by interconnected social norms, power relations, institutions, rules, and resource flows. In Bangladesh, gender inequality and social exclusion are shaped by patriarchal structures, gendered labor markets, centralized governance systems, and unequal access to rights, services, and decision-making spaces.

Through country-level implementation and learning, Helvetas Bangladesh has found that transversal integration of GSE is most effective when it is also treated as a foundational pillar of the country programme. When equity informs problem analysis, programme design, partnerships, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms from the outset, it becomes embedded in the system rather than applied as an add-on.

Why Gender Justice and Social Inclusion

Gender injustice and social exclusion are not marginal social concerns; they are systemic failures with far-reaching consequences for societal wellbeing, economic performance, and long-term stability.

When important segments of the population are excluded from education, decent work, resources, and decision-making processes, societies lose human potential, weaken social cohesion, and increase the risk of inequality-driven conflict.

Global evidence consistently shows that gender inequality and social exclusion carry substantial economic, governance, and social costs. The World Bank has demonstrated that gender gaps in education, employment, and leadership reduce productivity and constrain economic growth, while the OECD finds that more equal societies are more resilient, innovative, and better equipped to manage crises. Evidence also shows that inclusive governance—where diverse groups participate—is linked to stronger accountability, better policy outcomes, and more equitable representation. Moreover, power inequalities and exclusion have been shown to undermine governance effectiveness and reinforce elite dominance in decision-making processes.

Gender Justice provides a necessary response to these challenges by framing inequality as a structural issue rooted in power relations, rights, and accountability. It recognizes that unequal outcomes are produced and sustained through policies, institutions, and social norms – not individual choices alone – and that sustainable development requires addressing these root causes.

Social Inclusion strengthens this justice-based perspective by ensuring that change benefits those most affected by inequality. It acknowledges that exclusion is often intersectional shaped by gender alongside class, age, disability, migration status, and other social identities.

Together, Gender Justice and Social Inclusion provide a necessary systems lens for understanding why inequality persists and why addressing it is essential for sustainable development, social stability, and shared prosperity.

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Operationalizing GJSI within Global GSE

Helvetas Bangladesh applies Gender Justice and Social Inclusion (GJSI) to translate the systems logic of the global Gender and Social Equity (GSE) framework into clear and practical action. This systems approach shapes how programme and projects analyze problems, design interventions, engage partners, and assess results—ensuring that equity is built into decisions from the beginning, rather than addressed later.

In practice, the GJSI lens brings focused attention to power, rights, and accountability across programme and organizational systems. It enables teams to analyze projects more deeply by examining:

- who has power and voice in decision-making.
- whose rights are respected or constrained.
- who is accountable when exclusion or harm occurs.

By intentionally applying GJSI across all working sectors, the Helvetas Bangladesh country programme strengthens coherence, accelerates gender- and inclusion-transformative change, and ensures alignment with Helvetas' global GSE commitments while remaining grounded in country realities.

To accelerate GJSI in practice, the country programme operationalizes this approach through:

- Designated GJSI focal persons in every project, supported by ongoing capacity development.
- Clear GJSI compliance and accountability mechanisms across country operations, project cycle management, and partnerships.

- Strategic guidance that emphasizes localization and power shifting as gender and social justice priorities.
- Practical tools such as gender markers, trackers, and the integration of GJSI into MEAL systems for learning and adaptive management.
- Continuous strengthening of PSEAH as part of safeguarding practice within organization as non-negotiable justice commitments.

Gender Justice and Social Inclusion as Foundational to the Country Programme

In Helvetas Bangladesh, Gender Justice and Social Inclusion are foundational to the country programme. GJSI underpins all working sectors—Voice, Inclusion and Cohesion; Water, Food and Climate; Skills, Jobs and Income; and the Humanitarian-Development Nexus—ensuring that sector outcomes contribute to systemic, equitable, and sustainable change, rather than isolated or short-term unequitable gains.

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